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STANISLAUS COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION APPROVES \$5.3 MILLION MASTER CONTRACT FOR CHILDCARE

Modesto, Ca. --- The Stanislaus County Office of Education (SCOE) and Modesto City Schools (MCS) will jointly provide countywide childcare to children from prenatal to age five and their families under a \$5.3 million dollar contract approved by the Stanislaus County Children and Families Commission.

“Childcare has been designated a top priority in our community. It’s an important need for families and the Commission is responding to that need,” said Executive Director Noe Paramo.

The contract, the largest awarded from Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds, calls for distributing the money in four areas--\$3,892,000 for childcare and development grants to include child health/mental health and parent education and support, \$750,000 for an Alternative Payment Program to provide funding for childcare vouchers to help the working poor, \$300,000 to support a Child Care Academy to build the base of qualified child care providers in the county, \$199,000 to help sustain Healthy Start programs, and \$159,000 for administration of the grants program. The contract is for one year and can be extended for two years.

“We’re pleased to bring closure to the contract process,” said Jim Enochs, Superintendent of Modesto City Schools. “It’s important that we get this funding out to support the child care needs of families in our community.”

SCOE staff provided an implementation update to the Commission at its March meeting. One of the initial priorities is to get funding flowing on the voucher program which targets working families with children 0-5 years old. Families must be willing to use

licensed childcare, be residents of Stanislaus County and meet income eligibility requirements. SCOE staff said they would begin advertising in April and expected childcare support for enrolled families to begin in May. Information on eligibility requirements is available by calling SCOE at 558-4040.

MCS and SCOE Staff are also working to develop the application process for childcare provider grants which earmarks nearly \$4 million for those wanting to expand or establish childcare options for working families. A tentative timeline outlines a May through July period to process applications with the Commission slated to approve applications in late August.

Stanislaus County Superintendent of Schools Martin Petersen applauds the childcare effort. "This funding will provide for *quality* childcare, which means more children will enter school ready to learn," he said. "We should feel proud to live in a community that places a high priority on children and families."

The master contract for early childcare is a big piece of a strategic plan outlined by the Stanislaus County Children and Families Commission. To date, the Commission has awarded \$2.9 million in grants to community agencies and organizations to provide early childhood programs and services.

Proposition 10 was a voter-approved ballot initiative passed in 1998 that added a 50-cent tax per pack of cigarettes. The monies collected are to be used to fund education, health and childcare programs that promote early childhood development, from prenatal to age five.

Stanislaus County receives about 7 million dollars a year from the tobacco tax revenue.